AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 1-40 without prejudice or disclaimer, and add new claims 41-80 as follows.

Claims 1-40 (Cancelled).

41. (New) A natural alkaline earth metal carbonate in particulate form having a d_{50} of about 0.5 μm or less and a moisture pick up of less than about 0.2 wt%.

42. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 41, having a surface moisture content less than about 0.25 wt% based on the dry weight of the carbonate.

43. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 42, having a surface moisture content less than about 0.20 wt% based on the dry weight of the carbonate.

44. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 41, wherein the particles of the carbonate have been treated with a hydrophobizing agent.

45. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 44, wherein the hydrophobising agent is an aliphatic carboxylic acid having from about 10 to about 24 carbon atoms in the chain.

46. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 45, wherein the hydrophobising agent is selected from stearic acid, palmitic acid, montanic acid, capric acid, lauric acid, myristic acid, isostearic acid, cerotic acid, and mixtures thereof.

47. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 44, having a surface moisture content less than about 0.25 wt% based on the dry weight of the carbonate.

48. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 41, wherein the d_{50} is at least about 0.2 μm.

49. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 48, wherein the d_{50} is about 0.4 μm or less.

50. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 49, wherein the d_{50} is about 0.4 μm.

51. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 41, wherein the carbonate has a surface area of less than about $14m^2/g$ as measured by the BET nitrogen method.

52. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 51, wherein the BET nitrogen surface area is at least about 10 m^2/g.

53. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 52, wherein the BET nitrogen surface area is about 12 m^2/g.

54. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 41, obtained by grinding a natural source of calcium carbonate, magnesium carbonate, calcium magnesium carbonate, or barium carbonate.

55. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 54, obtained by grinding a natural source of calcium carbonate selected from chalk, limestone, and dolomite.

56. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 41, obtained by grinding marble.

57. (New) The alkaline earth metal carbonate of claim 54, wherein the carbonate is essentially free of hygroscopic and hydrophilic chemicals.

58. (New) A process for making a particulate alkaline earth metal carbonate, comprising grinding a natural source of alkaline earth metal carbonate under conditions

to produce a particulate material having a d_{50} of about 0.5 μm or less and a surface area of less than about 14 m^2/g as measured by the BET nitrogen method.

59. (New) The process according to claim 58, wherein the natural source of alkaline earth metal carbonate is dry ground.

60. (New) The process according to claim 58, wherein the natural source of alkaline earth metal carbonate is wet ground.

61. (New) The process according to claim 60, wherein the amount of water soluble hydrophilic dispersant remaining following grinding is not greater than about 0.05% by dry weight of carbonate.

62. (New) The process according to claim 58, wherein the particulate material is dried to a state such that not more than about 0.25 wt% surface moisture content remains associated with the material.

63. (New) The process according to claim 58, wherein the particulate alkaline earth metal carbonate is treated with a hydrophobising agent, the resulting treated carbonate having a surface moisture content of no more than about 0.25 wt%.

64. (New) A process for making a particulate alkaline earth metal carbonate, comprising processing a natural source of alkaline earth metal carbonate under conditions including grinding conditions to produce a particulate material having a d_{50} of about 0.5 μm or less and a moisture pick up of less than about 0.2 wt%.

65. (New) The process according to claim 64, wherein the natural source of alkaline earth metal carbonate is dry ground.

66. (New) The process according to claim 64, wherein the natural source of alkaline earth metal carbonate is wet ground.

67. (New) The process according to claim 66, wherein the amount of water soluble hydrophilic dispersant remaining following grinding is not greater than about 0.05% by dry weight of carbonate.

68. (New) The process according to claim 64, wherein the particulate material is dried to a state such that not more than about 0.25 wt% surface moisture content remains associated with the material.

69. (New) The process according to claim 64, wherein the particulate alkaline earth metal carbonate is treated with a hydrophobising agent, the resulting treated carbonate having a surface moisture content of no more than about 0.25 wt%.

70. (New) The process according to claim 64, wherein the particulate material has a surface area of less than about 14 m^2/g as measured by the BET nitrogen method.

71. (New) A polymer composition comprising a polymer material and a natural alkaline earth metal carbonate as claimed in claim 41.

72. (New) The polymer composition according to claim 71, wherein the polymer composition is a moisture-curing polymer composition.

73. (New) The polymer composition according to claim 72, wherein the moisture-curing polymer comprises silane groups.

74. (New) The polymer composition according to claim 73, wherein the moisture-curing polymer is selected from polyurethanes provided with terminal silane groups, polyether polymers with terminal silane groups, and polysulfide polymers with terminal silane groups.

75. (New) The polymer composition according to claim 71, wherein the polymer composition is a two-component polyurethane system.

76. (New) The polymer composition according to claim 71, wherein the composition comprises at least about 25% of the natural alkaline earth metal carbonate based on the total weight of the composition.

77. (New) The polymer composition according to claim 71, wherein the composition comprises up to about 75% of the natural alkaline earth metal carbonate based on the total weight of the composition.

78. (New) The polymer composition according to claim 71, wherein the composition comprises from about 40 to about 70 wt% of the natural alkaline earth metal carbonate based on the total weight of the composition.

79. (New) The polymer composition of claim 71, wherein the composition is a sealant, a mastic, a coating, an adhesive, a plastisol or a rubber.

80. (New) A cured element obtained by curing the polymer composition of claim 71.